

NFLA Newsletter

Autumn 2008

New Sondreson Hall porch a community effort

Community service moved front and center this summer, as a host of volunteers led by Frank Vitale demolished Sondreson Hall's decaying front porch and replaced it with a new model. The new porch features a full roof over the deck and composite stairs that will last for years, yet retains the original rustic look of the hall.

The project took some six long work days. North Forkers who donated their time, tools, money and materials are too numerous to mention. Special thanks, however, go to: Vitale, who designed the porch, and organized and supervised the project; North Fork builder Rob Fisher, whose expertise contributed to the excellence of the finished product; Lee Secrest, who donated and milled most of the awesome lumber; Tom Edwards, who donated \$1,000 for the porch, and arranged for Western Building Center to provide materials at cost and with free delivery; Eric Martin of Western Building Center in Columbia Falls, who tweaked the materials list and saw that materials were delivered on time; Rob Alm, who donated and delivered a load of gravel for the base; Gerry Stearns, Bonnie Ogle and Karen McDonough, who coordinated the lunch program.

Thanks to all for a job well done!

Heli-skiing on the North Fork?

Two firms have applied for permits to operate heli-skiing operations in the Coal Creek and Stillwater state forests. The Coal Creek State Forest lies entirely within the North Fork watershed, adjacent to Home Ranch Bottoms private land south of Polebridge. The Stillwater State Forest is west of the Whitefish divide, north of Whitefish Lake.

Although the comment period ended Oct. 10, the application is still being processed. The next step, says the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation's Nicole Stickney, is formulation of a "develop issue statement" compiled from public comments, and by DNRC personnel and other sources.

To get on the DNRC's mailing list, call Stickney at (406) 881-2666 or e-mail her at nstickney@mt.gov. The original scoping letter and area map can be found on the **NFLA Web site**.

NFLA to establish road committee

In an effort to develop expertise about North Fork Road maintenance and dust-abatement options, inform the community about those options, and promote more orderly meetings, North Fork Landowners' Association President Molly Shepherd and the board of directors have decided to establish a standing road committee.

According to plans announced at the Oct. 4 NFLA business meeting, the committee,

rather than the board, will receive member concerns and requests about the road. It will be independent of other North Fork organizations and function within the stated purposes of the NFLA—among them pursuing the interests of all landowners.

Thanksgiving dinner Nov. 27

Steve Berg will once again host Thanksgiving dinner at Sondreson Hall.

Doors will open at 3 p.m., Nov. 27, with dinner served at 4 p.m. Berg will provide the turkeys; participants are asked to bring a side dish and their own table settings.

Inter Local meeting Feb. 10

The semiannual Inter Local Agreement meeting will be held at 10 a.m. Feb. 10 at the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks regional headquarters, 490 North Meridian in Kalispell.

The meeting, also held at Sondreson Hall on the North Fork in July, brings together North Forkers and representatives of agencies that affect the North Fork.

Burning ends Nov. 30

Open burning of slash and other natural debris will be allowed without a burning permit from Oct. 1 through Nov. 30.

Compliance with air-quality restrictions will be required, however. In Flathead County, call the Air Quality Hotline at (406) 751-8144 or check the burning center's Web site before igniting your fire.

Flathead National Forest projects

Glacier View District Ranger Jimmy DeHerrera reports that the U.S. Forest Service's regional forester has affirmed the Flathead National Forest's Red Whale fuel-reduction project decision, which was issued in the spring of 2008.

Appeals had been filed by a number of organizations, including the Montanans for Multiple Use and the Swan View Coalition. Affirmation of the decision means the project can go forward.

DeHerrera anticipates offering Red Whale as a stewardship project. Proposals will be solicited in the spring; work might begin in the summer. Major drainages in the area are lower Whale, Red Meadow, Moose and Hay creeks. The project will involve mechanical thinning and prescribed burning.

The Flathead National Forest's Trail Fuels Reduction Project is essentially finished. It involved treating some 1,350 acres in the Trail Creek and upper North Fork River areas to reduce hazardous fuels, and create a forest condition that will lower the risk of future high-intensity wildfire. The project was given priority status because of the large number of residential buildings along Trail Creek Road.

Fire Mitigation Committee members are pleased that the project complements efforts by private landowners.

Mild fire season in 2008

Mild, damp weather pretty much put a damper on wildfires on the North Fork in 2008. The last reported fires on the North Fork were the result of lightening strikes the weekend of Aug. 9-10.

Flathead National Forest firefighters responded to five fires on the Hungry Horse/Glacier View Ranger Districts, and within 24 hours had them under control. The largest was one-quarter acre. Three lightning-caused fires on the Flathead and one in Glacier National Park were managed as wildland fire-use fires.

Two of the North Fork fires were off Hallowat Creek, one was on Akinkoka Peak off Moose Creek, and two were off Cyclone Creek. Also, a fire was ignited by a lightening strike July 1 south of Red Meadow Creek Road about half way between the North Fork Road and Red Meadow Lake. It grew to about 4.5 acres before being controlled.

“Wildland fire use” is the management of naturally ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific pre-stated resource-management objectives in predefined geographic areas outlined in the U.S. Forest Service’s Fire Management Plans.

Foresters to receive NFLA awards

Members of the North Fork Landowners Association have voted to give thank-you awards to Mike Justus, Bill Swope and Mason Richwine for their work in implementing the fire-mitigation cost-share program.

Justus, a Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation forester, was instrumental in applying for the North Fork’s original \$150,000 grant and in launching our assessment and cost-share assistance programs.

Swope, the Northwest Regional Resource Conservation and Development Council’s lead forester, and forester Richwine have worked with North Fork landowners since 2004, performing assessments, developing treatment plans and entering into contracts for fuels reduction.

The awards will be given at the June 2009 NFLA business meeting.

What it costs to run Sondreson Hall

According to figures compiled by North Fork Landowners’ Association Secretary-Treasurer Pat Cole, it cost the association about \$2,184 per year to maintain and operate Sondreson Hall from 2003 through 2007.

Income from hall-rental fees during that period (excluding \$2,400 paid by the U.S. Forest Service for extended use of the hall during the 2003 North Fork wildfires) averaged only \$237.50 annually. Member dues average \$2,450 per year. In fiscal years 2005-2006 and 2006-2007, the association operated at a total net loss of \$623. In 2008,

\$3,000 was budgeted for the new hall porch.

NFLA-sponsored events include five business meetings per year; board-of-directors, committee and North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee meetings; NFLA-sponsored workshops; the summer Inter Local Agreement meeting; social events such as square dances, a pie and ice cream social, and Thanksgiving dinner.

In order to offset some of these expenses, the board of directors voted in 2008 to increase the hall-rental fee from \$50 per day for NFLA members and \$100 per day for non-members to \$75 per day for members and \$150 per day for non-members.

Before the June 2009 business meeting, the NFLA board of directors will consider revising the rental policy to accommodate short-term users.

North Fork Landowners' Association

Polebridge, Montana

President Molly Shepherd
Vice President Oliver Meister
Immediate Past President Ed Heger
Secretary-Treasurer Pat Cole
North Directors Steve Berg & Lynn Ogle
South Directors Jan Caldwell & Frank Vitale
Newsletter/Webmaster Richard E. Wackrow
Web site www.NFLandowners.org

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